

Paper Houses by orphan_account

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Summary:

"I think," uttered Mike, his gaze darted around the room, looking everywhere except right at Lucas and Dustin, "I think I like Will."

Mike didn't dare look up or meet his friends' eyes. Instead, he fiddled with the loose thread in his sweater that suddenly caught his attention.

It was all weird and confusing; because to Mike, it was not everyday that you would realize that you were actually in love with your best friend.

1. inception

Author's Note:

Hello! This is my first time writing a stranger things fanfiction. Byler is one of my biggest otps aside from Larry Stylinson and I couldn't help but write more about this ship. I hope you enjoy this story as much as I did while writing it hoho

Also, shoutout to Gabriel Ackerman for proofreading my work. Love 'ya!!

It was usually the Friday classes that Mike Wheeler couldn't cope with. He had been sitting in his chair for the best part of two hours, watching mindlessly how Mr. Clarke lectured the whole class about another theory he came up with (that Mike could not decipher, surprisingly) from behind the desk.

It wasn't that Mr. Clarke was a boring teacher. Mike knew that although some students find it hard to stay awake during his class, he always tries his best to make them seem more interesting. Surely, It wasn't the subject either. Like his best friends, Science is Mike's specialty. They have even created a few projects for several contests and even won some with Mr. Clarke's help. Nonetheless, it was such a rare occasion for Mike to wander off during classes - especially Science.

Mike continued to stare at Mr. Clarke, craning his neck to keep him in view as he set off around the room for a few minutes.

But he was still bored. So he yawned and looked away.

Giving up at last to try and pay attention, Mike sighed and rested his chin against the palm of his hand and observed his friends instead. His eyes roved over Dustin who was, unlike Mike, listening, word for word, to Mr. Clarke intently and Lucas, who was concentrating more on Max (who was mindlessly staring off the window at the very back

of the room) than Mr. Clarke's lesson. Mike scoffed because apparently, Lucas is a lovesick idiot.

He turned away and resumed his observation when finally, his eyes landed on the quiet boy sitting at his right - Will Byers.

Unlike the others, Will was too occupied on his own. The concentration he has every time he draws random illustrations at the back of his sketchpad was something Mike had always loved to watch. It was like he was stuck in his own world and nobody could bother him. Mike loved how Will's eyebrows would scrunch down on his forehead every time he's colored a part of his drawing wrong or how his eyes would light up when he's perfectly drawn something right from his imagination. It was all entertaining to watch.

At least, when he's not caught watching.

"It's rude to stare." Said Will, not moving his gaze away from his art.

Mike giggled in return. "It's rude not to pay attention in class." He whispered, smirking.

Will looked up at him and frowned, "You're not paying attention either."

"It's Science, Will. I know all of these." Bragged Mike. He jokingly puffed out his chest and leaned up his chin in pride.

Will giggled softly. He opened his mouth to protest but was cut off when the bell rang suddenly - signaling dismissal. Although a bit infuriated that he was interjected, Will still laughed. "Finally." he whispered to Mike almost inaudibly.

Mike grinned at him before standing up from his seat a bit enthusiastically, which startled Will a little. "Hey," He turned to Dustin and Lucas, grabbing his backpack off the floor. He slung one strap over his shoulder, and then picked up his science notebook from his desk. "Do you guys have dates for the Snowball already?"

"Nope." Said Dustin while slinging the straps of his own backpack over his shoulders. "But I asked Steve to give me some tips. You know, to get the girls to dance with me." He explained further as they

started walking out of the room, pausing to say goodbye to Mr. Clarke who only nodded in response.

"You're seriously asking Steve for advice?" Lucas asked, eyebrows raised in disbelief.

"Yeah. And I'll let my pearls do the rest." Dustin purred, grinding his teeth and proudly showing it off to his friends.

"You know, you should stop doing that." Mike said before shifting his gaze towards Lucas. "How about you?"

"Me?" Lucas' eyes widened in surprise. "I, uh, I'm gonna take M-Max. I-I haven't asked her though." He stuttered out, awkwardly scratching the back of his head. "What about you, Mike?"

Mike sighed. "Nope, not yet."

"What about Eleven?" asked Dustin, "Didn't you promise her that you would take her?"

"Yeah," It was true. Over a year ago, before everything went downhill, Mike had promised Eleven that he would take her to the Snowball. Shockingly, he had also professed to her that night and even stole a kiss from her. Mike was still a bit embarrassed about that in all honesty. "Hopper said she needs to lay low for a while. You know, after everything that happened." He shrugged.

"That sucks, man." Dustin spoke, who then turned to look at Will. "How about you, Will? Are you taking Jennifer? Make the moves? Eh?" He asked, wiggling his eyebrows teasingly.

For a moment, Mike felt his chest tighten. His eyes narrowed as he waited for Will's answer.

"No," Will finally said, Mike didn't have a clue why he suddenly felt relief wash over him. "And I'm not planning too."

"Do you have someone else in mind, then?"

Even before Lucas had finished his sentence, Will was already shaking his head. "It's not like anyone would want to come with

Zombie Boy Byers." He laughed.

Mike knew that even when Will sounded like he was joking, he was actually serious. They have been best friends their whole life and Mike knew how to read Will like an open book.

Suddenly, Mike stopped walking and glanced at Will, "I would." He blurted out before he could stop himself.

Mike watched as Will froze in his place. He looked back at him with the same intensity and suddenly, Mike's chest tightened and he felt a fluttering, odd sensation deep in his gut that he couldn't explain.

"So you would take a boy as your date? Great idea, Mike."

Mike snapped out of his thoughts and turned to glare at Dustin. "What's wrong with that?"

"Dude. It's a dance. This is where you should take your 'special someone'" Dustin explained, emphasizing the last two words with air quotes. "You don't take your best friend, specially if he's a guy like you. In fact, Troy and James would be there. You wouldn't want to get tormented by those assholes and call you—"

"Gay?" Will interjected, eyebrows knitted together.

"Yeah," Dustin cleared his throat, "That."

"They're gonna have to mind their own business, then." Will snapped, suddenly avoiding eye contact. "I have to go. Mom's probably outside." And without another word, he run off.

Mike stared at Will's retreating back while Lucas and Dustin exchanged looks. He wondered why Will became upset when the issue was brought up. He rarely snaps like that, Mike thought.

"Give him a break." Lucas sighed, patting Mike's shoulder soothingly. "The whole school has been making up rumors about him being, you know, gay. He probably just remembered and became upset."

Mike nodded in understanding, his gaze never leaving the direction where Will disappeared off to.

Right. Maybe it was just that.

The next day, Will came back and never mentioned anything about the incident. It was like no words were exchanged the day before. However, he started to become more silent than usual. But Mike never thought any of it. Until one day, Will approached him after school.

"Mike," Will spoke. His voice was unusually quiet.

"Yeah?" He responded. Mike stopped unlocking his bike and looked up at Will, who was staring down at Mike's bike lock like it was the most interesting thing in the world. He noticed how vulnerable he looked at the moment. His cheeks were tainted red and his hands were shaking as he gripped both of the straps of his backpack. Mike stood up and frowned, "Are you okay, Will?"

Will didn't budge and he started whispering words that Mike could barely hear. For a moment, he thought that the Mind Flayer has come and took over Will's body again.

But Will suddenly looked up. He took a deep breath and,

"Mike, will you be my date at the Snowball?"

It was so fast that Mike almost couldn't believe he heard it. He stared at Will whose eyes were tearing up in anxiety. Will had asked him to the dance. Of all people, he asked Mike. Although a bit surprising nonetheless, it didn't fail to make his heart jump for reasons he couldn't understand. He gaped at Will who looked like he was imploding because of his flustered face. He was adorable, Mike thought.

"I-If you want to, t-that is. I-I just r-remembered that y-you said y-you would go with m-me so I thought t-that.. It's r-really okay if you d-don't want t-to-" Will stammered, trying his best to avoid Mike's eyes.

"Yeah, sure." Mike replied happily. He watched Will freeze in his place.

"Y-Yes?" Will asked in disbelief, as if he couldn't believe that Mike had agreed, his huge hazel eyes gaping at him; it almost sparkled.

"Yeah." Mike nodded. Suddenly, he felt that weird sensation in his gut but he only shrugged it off and smiled. "Why not? I told you I would go with you."

Mike couldn't forget that huge smile Will had given him that day.

A few days had gone by and the night of the dance finally came. Mrs. Wheeler made sure that Mike was wearing his best look. She had made him wear a blue button up shirt along with Mr. Wheeler's red necktie underneath a gray striped jumper and a copper blazer. Although a bit aggravated that he didn't get to choose what he wanted to wear, Mike had to admit that he looked quite good – but its not like he's gonna grant her the satisfaction by saying that out loud though.

"The girls are gonna go crazy over you," Mrs. Wheeler would whisper. He would only roll his eyes.

Mike was the least surprised when he walked into the school's dimly lit gym. He had been expecting it to be a little better than the previous year's Snowball, but it only turned out to look the same. Although a bit displeased, Mike found it hard not to be enchanted by the twinkling blue and gold lights that lined up from the wall up to the ceiling where a shimmer of glitter danced, illuminated by a huge disco ball.

"I'll go find Jonathan," said Nancy, snapping him out of his thoughts. She glanced down at Mike with a soft smile plastered across her face, "I'll be at the punch table if you need me, 'Kay?"

"Yeah, okay." Mike nodded, returning her smile. He watched as Nancy turned away and disappeared to the crowds of people.

Sighing, he looked around in hopes of finding his friends, quickly spotting Lucas and Max huddled around a table across from where he was standing. Grateful that he had company, Mike crossed the room to get to them but stopped and skidded to a halt when he realized who sat on one of the chairs, absentmindedly playing with a glass of punch Mike guessed he got from Nancy.

"Oh, hey man!" Lucas greeted with a huge grin. Mike paid him no

mind though, instead he gaped at Will who, unsurprisingly, was already staring up at him with the brightest smile. They stared at each other intently, and nobody dared to break eye contact.

Mike was astounded and he didn't know why. It was only Will — his best friend, the boy he approached at the swings, who smiled at him and agreed to be his friend. The same Will he cried over and over again when he thought he had died. But suddenly, he felt anxious and nervous in front of him. He felt odd and bewildered at the new feeling.

"What is up with the vest?" Said Mike, biting his lip to suppress a smile.

Will fake gasped, "Excuse me, Wheeler, you don't get to talk to me like that when you literally asked your mom to iron your hair!"

"Hey, I didn't even let her touch it." Mike giggled fondly.

The rest of the night was spent like that. Lucas, Dustin and Max were comically talking about the newest video game releases while, the other two, Mike and Will were sneaking back to back glances when the other was not looking. It was rather frustrating. Aside from Dustin's new hairstyle, Mike couldn't seem to find anything worthy to distract himself from the new thoughts that he couldn't believe he was even thinking. He was confused, dare say, of the feelings he just realized today that he has for the boy across him - Will Byers.

"You okay?"

Mike looked up, frowning when he realized that he and Will were the only ones left at the table. "Where is everyone?"

Will frowned. "Seriously?" He chuckled. "Max and Lucas went off to dance and Dustin, well, he said he was going to find some girls he can dance with."

"Oh." Mike deadpanned. Apparently, he was too deep in his own thoughts he became unaware of his surroundings. Awkwardly, he stole a glance at Will who was too occupied fiddling with the table cloth. Mike sighed to himself. Now they were both alone and he

doesn't have any hint of what to do.

They both stayed in an uncomfortable silence for a while, the only sounds that they would emit were their deep breaths and sighs. Then all of a sudden, a hush came over the huge crowd and a slow song came over the speaker. In that moment, Mike knew he had to do something.

"Will?"

Will looked up almost instantly, and Mike felt nervousness wash over him. Hesitantly, he stood up from his seat and offered him his hand. He felt heat rising in his cheeks and yet he asked, softly, "Will you dance with me?"

Will gaped at him at first. "B-But why?"

Gathering up his confidence, Mike grinned boyishly. "Aren't you my date?"

Will giggled and took his hand while he tries to ignore the sudden flutter in his stomach at the contact. "I don't know how to dance, Wheeler."

"Me neither." Mike laughed as he guided Will across the dance floor. He kept his eyes on him and yet, he still knew where exactly to take him. Everything seemed to be perfect and he felt as if he was in a dream.

"Mike, everyone is looking at us." Will whispered, looking around the crowd of people that surrounds them.

"Really?" Mike responded. He didn't take his gaze off Will and followed his eyes even as he tried to look away. "Ignore them."

Will looked up at him with eyes full of uncertainty but Mike only smiled at him reassuringly, squeezing his hands and gently putting it on his shoulder. "You literally told Dustin off by saying that these people should mind their own business, right? Have you suddenly changed your mind, Byers?"

"But," Will flinched slightly when Mike rested his hands against his

small waist. Mike watched as he squirmed under his gaze. Enjoying the effect he had on the smaller boy. "It was okay for me. But they would definitely taunt you about this."

"It's not like they don't taunt me everyday, Will." He rolled his eyes good naturedly, but he could still feel Will's qualm in his movements. He sighed.

Slowly, Mike started to dance to the music while Will awkwardly stepped side by side, completely allowing Mike to take command. "Relax." He leaned in and whispered to Will's ear.

Will took a deep breath and started following Mike's movements. He was a bit stiff at first but eventually, Will had relaxed in Mike's arms. Mike felt something spark when Will daringly moved himself closer to his body. However, this time, he let the unfamiliar sensation wash over him as he stared at Will's eyes. Mike didn't know why he was suddenly drawn by his eyes but he couldn't let himself look away. It was like his gaze was glued to his and he couldn't move; Like everyone surrounding them disappeared and Will was the only one he could see.

Slowly, Mike leaned dangerously close to Will's face. His eyes traveled down from Will's eyes to his lips. He only realized now how beautiful he really looked despite all the flaws he claimed to have. Mike didn't know what he was doing but he felt a force pushing him down to crash his lips against Will's.

But he resisted, He pushed him away.

Will was taken aback, pain and confusion etched all over his face, and he only stared up at Mike whose eyes were wide in realization.

Shit. He likes Will.

2. intrusive thinking

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter wasn't proofread but I hope it isn't that bad. Opinions are highly appreciated!!

"How should I know?"

It was the nth time that day that Mike Wheeler had rolled his eyes. It almost felt like his irises would disappear off his eye sockets any time soon if his friends would not stop following him and pestering him over something that he didn't want to talk about. He wanted to be left alone and think it through himself but unfortunately, Dustin would not give up and so do Lucas and Max.

"You were with him that night, Mike!" said Dustin. He only ignored him and continued unlocking his bike. "He ran off! And he started ignoring all of us!"

Mike stiffened. It's not like he didn't know. The past few days have been so tough with Will acting like he didn't exist. Every time they bump into each other in the hallways, Will would always look away or run off into another direction. Not only that, he started making up excuses not to attend Saturday D&D's and sleepovers. Mike couldn't help but blame himself. He knew he made Will uncomfortable after what happened at the Snowball. He wished he had more self control that time. Even so, he was still tormented and made fun of in school after taking a guy, "Zombie Boy Byers" more specifically, as his date for the dance. He knew Will had it worse, but Mike had only added fuel to the fire by actually agreeing with the idea.

"Did you do something that made him upset?" It was Lucas' turn to interrogate. "The whole school's talking about you guys!" Mike scoffed when Lucas held into his bike and forcefully snatched it off him to prove a point.

"I told you it was a bad idea taking him as your date." He heard

Dustin muttered.

Mike sighed in defeat. Dustin was right. If only he had refused to Will's invitation, none of this would have happened. "Look, I have no idea what's happened to Will, alright?" He finally snapped, frowning. He wrapped his hands around his bike handles and pulled it off Lucas. Mike gave him a pointed look. "And I know that they're all talking about Will and I. You guys don't know what kind of notes I've been receiving in my locker. Leave me alone, alright?"

And with that, he mounted his bike and kicked off without a second glance.

The next few days made not much of a difference. It was the start of Christmas Break and Mike hasn't made any plans for it except doing the usual Arcade and Sleepovers with the party. Also, Steve Harrington started coming over during these nights and play D&D's with them because apparently, Dustin and Steve are now best friends. It was all weird in Mike's opinion, considering that he also sucked at the game.

"Where's Will?" Steve asked one night, oblivious of the sudden tension that occurred due to an innocent question. Mike stiffened, and he watched cautiously as Dustin and Lucas shared a look. Max stopped fiddling with a game and watch she's found in the Wheeler's basement and stared at the other four. "I've been visiting for like, four times now, I still haven't seen Will around here. Is everything okay?" He added, eyes traveling from the handbook to the three kids around him.

"Well," Dustin spoke, "Mike and Will are in some kind of situation, you see."

Mike sent him a warning look, but Dustin was unfazed. "The school made up a huge rumor that they are, apparently, a couple."

Silence erupted in the room. The only sound emitted was Lucas' constant tapping on the table. The awkward atmosphere only broke when Steve decided to speak. "And?"

Dustin frowned, "And," he emphasized, "That kind of made their

friendship awkward!"

Steve only scoffed. "That's it? You let your friendship get ruined because of a rumor?" He laughed. Mike wondered what was so funny about it. "I mean, yeah, people would judge you if you're different. Look, Mike, so what if you like boys?"

"What?" Mike frowned. "I never said anything about me liking boys!" He paused. "Or liking Will specifically!"

"Oh, right." Steve deadpanned, Mike only glared at him. "So all those concern you got when Will was basically getting exorcised were platonic?"

Max, Lucas and Dustin all stared at Mike, awaiting for his answer. He didn't budge.

"I don't mean to judge but," Steve shrugged, "Friends don't look at each other like that." He simply stated as if saying it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Mike didn't respond. He gazed at Steve intently, his eyes searching for any hint of humor in his expression. Mike didn't find any.

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about." He finally said. He stood up from his seat, "In fact, the issue isn't entirely about the 'rumors'" explained Mike, putting air quotes around the last word. "It's more than that, it's something you guys know nothing about."

"I'm going to sleep." Mike retorted. He started to walk upstairs when Lucas shouted; "But what about the sleepover?"

He looked back, a frown etched on his face. "Not tonight, I guess."

Mike didn't have any idea what Steve was trying to tell him. He liked boys? It was a stupid idea and he couldn't believe that he actually thought that Mike wasn't normal. He was sure that he wasn't that. He liked Eleven! Not boys, or Will.

Besides, the emotions he felt that night was probably just a temporary feeling resulting from the heat of that moment. He was simply happy he danced with Will, his friend. That was all it. He likes

Will, sure. But it was only platonic. He likes Will as a friend. Not the same way he liked Eleven.

Plopping himself in his bed, Mike only stared blankly at the ceiling for a little while. The flashbacks of the events that occurred before flashed through his mind and he couldn't help but curse at himself because *Will! Will! Will!*

He had almost kissed Will before. He wondered what could've happened if he didn't regain consciousness that night. How would Will react? Would he push him away? Or kiss him back?

NO. Why was he even thinking about this?

Mike squeezed his eyes shut and put his arm over them. He didn't have any idea why his brain's only focusing on one person. Why Will kept running through his mind.

He couldn't help but doubt himself. *Was Steve right?*

"No, he isn't." He cried inaudibly. He wiped his face with the palm of his hands. He needed to talk to Will to fix all these misunderstandings. Besides, it has been a few weeks since they started avoiding each other like they weren't the best of friends.

Aggravated, he jumped off his bed and sneaked out of their house, mounting his bike and instantly made his way towards the Byers' residence. For some reason, He felt extremely nervous. Several times during the ride had Mike pulled off his hand from the bike handles to wipe the sweat off his palms on his sweater.

He arrived five minutes later, not even bothering to lock his bike on the Byers' porch. He wasn't sure if knocking on the front door was the best idea especially at an hour like this. He wouldn't want to disturb Joyce or Jonathan.

You know what? Fuck it.

After a full 7.8 seconds of arguing with himself, he decided to go around the house and knock on Will's window and *what was he doing.*

Will, who was unsurprisingly drawn into his sketchbook again, was

startled at first but was replaced with confusion as soon as he spotted Mike gracelessly standing outside his window. Mike even saw how Will frowned and mouthed his name in question. He waved awkwardly and he felt his heart started to race when Will approached and slid up the window.

"What are you doing here?" Will whisper-shouted. Although he didn't look very happy by his presence, Will held out his hand and pulled Mike in his room clumsily. Mike couldn't help but point out how he was a lot bigger than Will is. But surely, it was not the right time to say that out loud.

Mike straightened himself up and darted his gaze around Will's room as if he wasn't just here 2 and a half weeks ago. The room looked no different than the last time however, there were a few new drawings that Will had posted up the room; the party including Max and Eleven, the mind flayer, two boys in the swings, an illustration of Castle Byers and *is that him?*

"Mike?" Will called, shifting his attention from the drawing. He must've noticed Mike's curiosity. "Why are you here? It's an hour to midnight!"

"So," Mike cleared his throat as he gracelessly shuffled to his feet and plopped himself unto the chair of Will's study table. "How are you?"

Will raised an eyebrow suspiciously but proceeded to sit on his bed anyway. Mike noticed how he tensed up when Will saw his sketchbook and watched him slam it close. "I'm okay. You?"

He removed his gaze from the book and looked at Will. "I'm okay too."

A long silence filled the room and it grew more and more tense every second that passed. Will resorted in darting his eyes around his own room and Mike, he started to regret even coming. He didn't know why he came in the first place, he didn't even have anything to say.

"Mike," said Will abruptly, breaking the silence; in Mike's pleasure. He looked up at Will with hope filled eyes but Will didn't meet his gaze. "The snowball, I just—"

Mike stiffened at the mention of the Snowball. "Yeah?"

"I didn't mean it." Will cried. "I.. It must've been awkward for you. It was the heat of the moment, Mike."

Mike couldn't understand, "What do you mean?"

He watched in bewilderment as Will wiped his eyes with the back of his hand dramatically. "I almost kissed you, didn't I? I'm really sorry about it. I didn't know what I was thinking." Will started shaking uncontrollably and the first thing that Mike did was pull him in an embrace. *Because he would never want to see him like this.*

"I-It's okay, Will." Mike starting rubbing circles in Will's back soothingly. "Really, it is."

The last thing he remembered that night was that he was the first one to actually initiate the kiss. He didn't understand why Will was apologizing. Either way, he didn't bring it up. *Will initiated it, not him.* He reminded himself. *It wasn't him.*

But why?

They stayed like that for a little while. Will sniffling, head against Mike's heart as the latter's arms were wrapped securely around his smaller frame. There was nothing but pure, comfortable silence,

And Mike couldn't ask for anything better.